Employee Development in Retail Organization

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Abstract: Employee development became one of the key topics in the field of human resources management in current organizations. Taking a proper approach to employee and business development in this area can be a source of competitive advantage for organizations. However, few empirical studies have been conducted on the subject matter; there is still a need for further research to be conducted.

The research deals with the analysis of the perception of development activities in the retail organization based on a survey conducted through a structured questionnaire survey and analysis of internal company materials. The goal is to point out the perception of development activities by employees based on the survey, as well as to find out the main barriers that prevent employees from their development.

The results of the survey show that employees perceive the development on an individual level, the greatest benefit is seen in their professional and personal growth. The employees are interested in development, but only in their working hours, they are interested in training such as foreign language and computer skills. The primary motive for development is financial. The main barrier that prevents employees from their development is time or perceived lack of time. Another negative factor is that managers do not check, or control acquired knowledge and skills after training. On the other hand, as a positive result is seen the internal trainer at the training and receiving feedback from the manager on employees’ performance.

This paper is created for the retail organization to improve the area of employee development, as well as for scholars researching this topic and others interested in the development of employees in an international company.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the area of employee development and investment in this area has become a major field on which organizations have begun to place great emphasis. It is becoming increasingly clear that an organization that has qualified professionals in a particular field, who are constantly evolving and improving their skills and knowledge, can create products and offer services that will represent a competitive advantage in the market. It is important to be aware of what development activities bring to an individual as a personality and how he or she can use this knowledge throughout his or her professional or private life. (Mikołajczyk, 2021) stated that there are implications in tailoring activities and offering for development to fit the needs of employees to progress in their work. Therefore, an agile approach is necessary in these times.

In the organizations, some employees are developed and perform their best, their needs are fulfilled, and they are developed in an appropriate style, but some employees are underdeveloped, which means their skills and knowledge could be developed to perform their job (Singh, Singh

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and Pushkar, 2021). The employees are a valuable form and vital source of competitive advantage in the company (Kimani, Gesimba and Gichuhi, 2020). It is an employee who forms the core of the company, and although information technology is becoming more and more important today, there is no need to forget about people as the cornerstone of any organization, as a thinking and creative element that brings meaning and order.

There are employees who remain in their position for many years, but there are also employees who leave the organization due to a lack of growth opportunities (Kimani, Gesimba and Gichuhi, 2020). Employees should take part in training or other development activities to learn new skills, ideas, or concepts. Employee development is used to increase the abilities and efficiency of the individual to help organizations to reach their goals. Another important part of employee development are leaders who should stimulate it.

This paper focuses on the gap in the literature about the perception of development activities from the employee point of view, and barriers affecting employee development, especially in a retail area.

The structure of this paper is the following: (1) Literature review – introduces the main topic of this paper and the latest results of research in this area. (2) Methodology – describes the data used in research and the whole methodology. (3) Discussion – presents the results of the survey. (4) Conclusion – shows concluding remarks about employee development and the limits of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, employees are expected to take more responsibility for their own development, increasing their knowledge, enhancing current skills and adding new ones to meet job demands or prepare for leadership roles (Molloy and Noe, 2010). Employee development in organizations is a topic becoming more and more important. The time of current changes means the need to redefine the required competencies. According to Thomas Friedman (an American journalist and publicist), passion and curiosity are nowadays the most important components of employee development (Mikołajczyk, 2021; Goldglantz, 2013). Employee development may be diverse in its form: (1) training related to work; (2) training not related directly to work; (3) assessments and feedback; (4) promotions and enlargements of responsibility scope; (5) relationship among workers; (6) career planning actions; (7) projects and workgroup (Kedziora, Piotrowicz and Kolasinska-Morawska, 2018; Pierce and Maurer, 2009). Training should have specific goals such as increasing the personal effectiveness of employees (e.g. competence development), increasing the added value being achieved currently, generating future value, broadening the knowledge or skills required in a job or future job (Mikołajczyk, 2021). Research shows that training and development during the COVID-19 pandemic have consequences on many levels. It turns out that companies had to change the way of employee development and in some organizations, the development area has completely ceased to exist due to layoffs or reduced budgets; other organizations are investing in remote tools to continue employee development which caused the rapid development of the digital transformation of human resources departments (Kniffin et al., 2020; McGuire et al., 2021). New technologies are crucial in the fight against the crisis because of enabling communication, remote working, or online learning. The biggest advantage for employee development is the possibility to access the training materials online from anywhere, anytime and using various devices (Fake and Dabbagh,
Before the COVID-19 pandemic started, there have been conducted various researches in the field of employee development. One research by Deloitte showed that one of the three most significant challenges of companies is to transform and accelerate organizational training and development (Fajčíková, Fejfarová and Urbancová, 2016). Organizations often do not communicate properly the purpose of training and what are they trying to accomplish, and how the training will benefit each employee (Latif, Jan and Shaheen, 2013). Establishing the utility of the training program will make a positive impact on trainees to understand the need to learn and answer the basic questions of learners what is the benefit of that training (Jolles, 2005).

Acton and Golden (2003) in their study identified that training of employees positively relates to job satisfaction and contributes to building a negative relation to turnover. The objective of their study is to examine the association between job training satisfaction and learning and development aspects of job satisfaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

The object of this survey was an international retail organization operating in over 50 countries. The subject of the survey was an analysis of the perception of development instruments in a unit in Slovakia before the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The research was divided into multiple steps. Firstly, the analysis of internal materials of a company to understand the ways of working with employee development and the instruments was used. The company has its approach to ways of working with employee development as well as potential determination. According to these materials, everyone should have access to further development and the possibility to attend different pieces of training (in some cases after the manager’s approval or available for employees with growth potential). After understanding the company employee development approach, the first phase was finished and started the second one. The current study adopts a survey research design that involves the collection of primary data with the use of a structured questionnaire. The validity of the research instrument was achieved through content analysis and was also discussed with colleagues to ensure that the questionnaire is measuring what it purports to measure. The questionnaire consists of closed questions with the option to add own answer, open questions and questions based on the Likert Scale. As a part of pre-research, the questionnaire was discussed with HR professionals from the company. The collected data were analyzed with the data analysis, abstraction, synthesis, and deduction.

Of a total of 363 employees, 95 took part in this research, which means 26.17 % (64.2 % female, 35.8 % male) - 3.1 % of top management, 11.6 % of middle management. The most of employees 60 % worked for the company for 1-5 years.

4. RESULTS

The questionnaire found out whether employees participate in development activities, and when they last participated in one. The average number of pieces of training that employees have completed in the last year is 3.52. According to the answers, up to 70.5 % of employees have attended training in the last three months. It follows that the company is working on employee development and employees are involved in development activities.

Figure 1 shows the answers to the question in which employees stated what they see as the benefits of development activities. The biggest benefit is in their professional development in the first place, which was cited by 73.7% of employees, followed immediately by personal development,
which was cited by 67.4% of employees. The first three answers are concluded with the answer that it will help them concerning their colleagues. However, with superiors and subordinates, employees do not see much benefit. It follows from the graph that they see the benefits on an individual level rather than in a broader context.

**Figure 1.** Areas where participation in development activities is beneficial

**Source:** Own research

The other three questions in the questionnaire focused on interest in training. The first question was about what training employees are interested in, the second question went deeper and found out which trainings employees would attend, and the third question - which training they would attend if they took place outside their working hours. The answers clearly showed a foreign language (especially English, which is used as a communication language in the company), which 76.8% of employees would be interested in, and 68.4% of respondents would also participate outside working hours. Employees would also be interested in training such as conflict resolution, communication skills and training focused on personal growth, but only some of them would take part in off-hours training. The research, conducted among 389 organizations from all regions of the Czech Republic, showed that employees are willing to be trained and developed, but the courses must be proposed by the employer (50.2%). In 8.6% of cases, employees are not willing to train and if a course is proposed by the employer, they will take it (Fajčíková, Fejfarová, and Urbancová, 2016).

It is clear that employees are willing to develop in their free time if they see the activity as a benefit for themselves, their personal lives and not only for their work. They would also be interested in professional training that would take place during their working hours, which could mean that if they were to develop in connection with their work, they only wanted to do it at work. They would also be interested in personal training, leadership, communication skills and other soft skills training, which they would be able to benefit from in their private lives, but they also want to address them earlier during working hours. The reason may be that they tend to associate it with work and do not see a connection with private life.

The questionnaire asked also for motivation. The main motive for further development is a change in financial evaluation (65.3%), supplementing the missing knowledge (60%) and satisfying one’s own need for further development (58.9%). A very positive finding is that only 4.3% of employees said that they did not want to develop further, and therefore the company should
continue to focus on the topic of employee development because it makes sense to people. Employees are likely to associate their further development with their career growth, which is why they stated a change in the financial evaluation as the number one motive. Without their further development, it would be very difficult for them to grow to the next position.

The reason why employees do not participate in development activities is the time stated by 28.8% of respondents. As many as 39.8% of employees stated a different answer, of which 17% of employees did not state any other reason. It is arguable why the employees did not have time. The reasons may be different, for example, the employer did not give them time for further development during working hours, or they think/realize that they do not have room for development activities because they have a lot of work to do, or other reasons why respondents answered, “there was no time”.

Employees see the biggest barriers to development in the lack of time, which was stated by 46.3% of employees. Another reason is the one-time, unsystematic development program. 22.2% of employees stated that they did not see any barriers to development. And only one-tenth of the fewer answers are insufficient options. As in the previous question, in this question, employees stated a lack of time as the biggest barrier. The reasons may be similar to the previous question or other reasons, such as family situation, fatigue, two jobs and others. Other answers included: language skills or work-life balance.

In the following part are summed up the relevant answers to open questions. One of them is about the quality of employee development and how to improve it. The highest number of responses was vocational training, whether it was training in the programs and systems that employees use at work or training focused on practice and their specific position; among other answers were: financial reward, leader, possibility to choose their training, a wider choice of pieces of training, more time, regularity of the training, communication and better information.

The next questions focused on the trainer, specifically what the biggest benefit or shortage of internal trainers is. About 70% of employees said that the trainer knew the company, procedures, and
processes and had experience directly from the company. Almost 20% said that the benefit is that the trainer knows the participants personally, creates a friendly atmosphere, is more empathetic and knows the company culture. The rest said it was of no benefit or that the company is saving the cost of an external trainer. The biggest disadvantages, that most employees saw were professionalism and expertise. The external trainer is more professional and has more knowledge of the issue, and sees things more from the outside and not just from the company environment. About 20% saw no disadvantage of an internal trainer. In the study conducted by Acton and Golden (2003) among 317 Marketers and Offices was found that the trainer has a significant impact on the overall satisfaction with training; the results of the earlier study by Jackson (1999) found that engaging in training and providing discussion prompts are important aspects for a successful training as well as in the study by Choo and Bowley (2007) was found that trainees highly value a helpful and well-prepared trainer.

The last part of the questionnaire consisted of scale questions, where respondents could answer on a scale of one to five, with one meaning disagree at all, two rather disagree, three disagree, four rather agree and five meaning strongly agree.

**Table 1. Evaluation of scaling questions from the questionnaire survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Average answer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My manager gives me enough feedback about my performance.</td>
<td>4,03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We talk to my supervisor about ways to improve my abilities and skills.</td>
<td>3,75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider development activities at company to be beneficial.</td>
<td>3,72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We talk to my supervisor about how I can improve my performance.</td>
<td>3,71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company supports my development.</td>
<td>3,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the future, I plan to develop my career at my current company.</td>
<td>3,58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The knowledge and skills acquired at company’s training can be used in practice.</td>
<td>3,57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company offers plenty of development activities.</td>
<td>3,53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have enough information about development opportunities from my manager.</td>
<td>3,43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer an internal trainer (company employee).</td>
<td>3,42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the development opportunities at my company.</td>
<td>3,35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have enough information about development opportunities from the personnel department.</td>
<td>3,20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the training, my supervisor checks the acquired knowledge and skills directly during the job.</td>
<td>2,87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the training, my supervisor checks the acquired knowledge and skills directly in another way.</td>
<td>2,80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Own research

The survey showed that the manager gives enough feedback about performance to the employees but on the other hand does not check the acquired knowledge and skills after training. The research, conducted among 389 organizations from all regions of the Czech Republic, showed that 77.4% (301) of the approached organizations train their employees, of which only 40.2% of organizations systematically evaluate the effectiveness of training and development of their employees (Fajčíková, Fejfarová and Urbancová, 2016).

### 5. CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that employees perceive the development on an individual level, given that they see the greatest benefit in their professional and personal growth. In the fact, employees are interested in further training, but only during working hours. In addition to their working hours, they are willing to attend training such as a foreign language or computer skills, which
they can also use in their private lives. The unexpected was the motive for further development, where employees most often stated a change in financial evaluation. Financial evaluation is motivating for employees, but as part of the development, the company strives to emphasize strengthening their professional skills and personal growth. Greater awareness could contribute to a deeper perception of the topic and employees would see the positive effects of their further development on their personal and career lives, and not only at the financial level, which they mentioned as their motivator for further development. The biggest negative result is the lack of time for development activities, and also time is perceived as the biggest barrier. It cannot determine exactly in what sense employees perceive time as a barrier to development. They may feel that they have a lot of work responsibilities that they have to do and do not have the space to do other activities. Another negative fact is that the manager does not check the acquired knowledge and skills of his employees in any way after the end of the training. Employees may find training unnecessary if their manager does not verify what they have learned from the training. According to research, one of the biggest advantages positively evaluated by employees was that the trainer at the training was internal, from the company. Another positive fact was receiving feedback from the manager on performance which received the highest rating in the scaling questions.

It is also interesting to note that employees are interested in various other pieces of training that the company does not yet offer, so it would be worth considering these options, or finding out if other employees who did not participate in the questionnaire survey are equally interested. If so, the company could add these pieces of training (some at least online) and include them among the options offered. On the other hand, employees are interested in further training, especially within their working hours, and therefore management must determine the rules as to who and under what conditions each activity or training could take part. Lack of time is considered to be the biggest barrier to further development, so the company’s management should find out why this is a barrier. This may be due to labor shortages, or the addition of additional tasks to employees, or work on changes that do not allow them to participate in different activities. As the company provides various opportunities for further development, these barriers must also be taken into account, which may mean that the activities are not available to all employees.

The internal trainer at the training was perceived more positively than the external trainer. Nevertheless, expertise needs to be ensured, so it is sometimes appropriate to use the services of an external trainer who can have more experience in the field, which can enrich the participants. In training for managers, training with an external trainer is often more effective because it can bring an “outside” view of the topic, outside the company environment, which allows managers to come up with other options they may not have been aware of before.

A good picture for the company is that managers provide their employees with enough feedback about their performance. Feedback is very important in further development and can serve as a useful tool for their analysis, so each employee knows their strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge is important if an employee wants to grow into a managerial position, to know what to work on and what he or she is good at, and also to learn to provide feedback to his or her future team. It is also useful for an employee who does not want to move to a managerial position because he or she can eliminate his or her weaknesses and work more efficiently, or also improve his or her strengths and set an example for others.

As the questionnaire survey showed that managers do not check the acquired skills of their employees after the end of the training, it is recommended that the personnel department informs
the managers about the content of the training, which may cause non-verification of knowledge and skills, or set a plan or prepare questions about what managers should check after the training.

The current research has several implications for theory and practice. At the theoretical level, it extends the research to the factors influencing employee development in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Moreover, it offers practical information for human resources specialists, especially learning and development specialists and for managers about further ways of working with the topic of employee development in the company; it also provides results in form of barriers that can be avoided in the future to increase the participation rate in training as well as the higher motivation of employees which results in more developed staff.

This research required to address several limitations. Firstly, the present study has a small sample size. In particular, the survey sample consists of only 26% of the company’s employees, which may lead to skewed results. If the survey will be conducted repeatedly with a higher number of employees, it could verify the results obtained. Secondly, the survey was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has started, therefore it is recommended to compare the current situation in the retail organization. Thirdly, although the questionnaire survey was designed to cover all necessary areas of research, there were unanswered questions that should be examined further. For example, further research could go deeper and find out the perception of development activities specifically after every single activity that the company offers. Furthermore, it is not clear why employees consider time the biggest barrier to development. In addition, the results of this study are based on only one retail organization.

In the case of a repeat, it is recommended to find out which specific training employees are interested in because the survey showed that they are interested in professional training, but it is not clear what they mean by professional training exactly. It is necessary to discuss in more detail why time is the biggest barrier to further development in order to eliminate this deficiency.

In the future, it would be better to investigate the impact of other determinants of development, even in aggregate forms such as salaries, workplace benefits, or overall job satisfaction.

REFERENCES


